



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Kyrgyz Constitutional Referendum

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Douglas A. Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 6, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States too is grateful to the Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan for providing a prompt and comprehensive report on the results of the referendum. Nonetheless, we are disappointed that the Kyrgyz government chose to proceed with its constitutional referendum on the 2nd of February over the vocal objections of opposition groups and of many in the international community who argued that there had been insufficient time to analyze the proposed changes and to allow a public debate.

We are also troubled by reports from independent monitors and observers that raise concerns about the credibility and impartiality of the voting. The reported widespread electoral violations may undermine public confidence in the constitution and call into question the mandate that the government now claims.

Mr. Chairman, the basic test of any democracy, whether it be a new or an enduring one, is how well it responds to legitimate public concerns. As such, Kyrgyzstan will be judged in the long term less by the conduct of the recent referendum than by its willingness to listen and respond to substantive concerns about the new constitution from opposition groups, the international community, and elections and constitutional experts.

In this respect, we welcome President Akayev's commitment to introduce changes after the referendum that would address concerns about protection for human rights and balance of powers as discussed during the recent visit of the United States Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Ambassador Beth Jones. My government would strongly encourage the Government of Kyrgyzstan to invite the Venice Commission to conduct an analysis of the new constitution. The Venice Commission could usefully provide Kyrgyzstan with an expert evaluation, could give its opinion on whether the new constitution meets international standards, and could provide recommendations on what changes might be needed.

All of this, we believe, would lead to the goal that all democracies share: ensuring that the constant changes in society are properly reflected in a country's body of constitutional laws.

Thank you.